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Editorial

With this issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* we mark the commencement of the fourth volume. In our first issue in September 2000 we stated our aim as giving Baptists in Europe the opportunity to explore issues of theology and practice that are relevant to them.

In this issue we continue with a theme from the last issue introduced by my colleague, Rollin Grams, as we seek to explore how disciples might live out the life of witness under the one true God revealed in Jesus Christ. We know this is far from easy. We struggle with issues of the relationship of our faith in Jesus Christ and the cultures in which we find ourselves. In this second major article Rollin continues where he left off in *JEBS 3:3* and offers twelve criteria we might consider. His article raises issues which belong to a debate within the gathering communities of intentional disciples, and we are helped to engage in that debate in the responses of Peter Penner and Parush Parushev. Our intention in devoting space to this theme is to assist you in your own setting to engage with this key topic for our witness in the contemporary world.

The final article is the Graduation Address delivered at IBTS in May 2003. My colleagues on the editorial committee insisted it be included in the *Journal,* so I do this as a 'man under authority'. It is not our normal type of contribution, but they believe it says something important about the Christian learning community out of which this *Journal* comes.

In the book reviews I draw your attention to the book *Transformational Preaching* written by our colleague, David M. Brown. This book arises out of a course run at the request of Russian Baptists as a co-operative venture by the All-Union Council, American Baptist Churches International Ministries and IBTS. It is available in both English and Russian and I predict it will become the key textbook on preaching amongst European evangelicals.

The whole of Volume Four of the *Journal* will be more thematic in content than previously. Our next issue will explore missiology, with key papers by leading mission thinkers. Our third issue in this volume will concentrate on papers reflecting on our Baptist identity.

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The Use of Biblical Norms in Christian Ethics

Introduction

The question of what is transculturally normative or culturally relative arises constantly for Christians reading their Bibles as an authority on how to live. Questions about the role and status of women in the church, from head coverings to ordination, about sexual relationships (premarital sex and homosexuality), about whether the Bible promises prosperity or calls us to an unwavering commitment to help the poor, the use of alcohol, keeping the Sabbath and so forth, all come to focus on how we understand what is transcultural and what is culturally relative among the imperatives of scripture.

In 'The Case for Biblical Norms in Christian Ethics',[1] I first suggested reasons for so robust an attack on the very notion of biblical norms in Christian ethics today. I then offered some counter-arguments to create space for the use of biblical norms in Christian ethics. This leads us to the purpose of this article: to suggest guidelines for the use of biblical norms in Christian ethics. My twelve criteria, with their sub-points, are meant to be used as possible ways in which to distinguish between those biblical norms, rules or imperatives which are culturally relative and those which are transculturally normative. The arguments that follow only make sense if one accepts the Christian belief that scripture is God's authoritative Word for the Church *and* that scripture is originally written in specific contexts to specific audiences for specific purposes. These two beliefs raise the question that this article seeks to answer.

The Use of Criteria in Appealing to Scripture in Christian Ethics

The use of scripture in Christian ethics[2] needs to cover four general areas:[3]

1. The use of biblical norms, rules, and imperatives in Christian ethics;

2. The use of biblical principles, values, and virtues in Christian ethics;

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[1] Rollin G. Grams, 'The Case for Biblical Norms in Christian Ethics', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol. three, No. 3 (May 2003), pp. 5-16.

[2] One of the earlier, crucial discussions of this question was that of James Gustafson, 'The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study', *Interpretation* 24 (1970), pp. 430-455. Thomas W. Ogletree's detailed study remains an important discussion, using a phenomenological approach and non-narrative categories for his discussion (teleology, deontology, character, and context). See his *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

[3] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) speaks of four modes of appeal to scripture: rules, principles, paradigms and symbolic world (p. 209).

3. The use of biblical narratives, paradigms, and examples in Christian ethics;

4. The use of a biblical worldview in Christian ethics.

This article, with its focus on the first of these areas, is therefore only a part of a larger discussion of the use of scripture in Christian ethics, which, more often than not, focuses on the other general areas. For example, Charles Cosgrove's recently published *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate* rules out the use of scripture prescriptively from the start, although his 'rule of purpose' is relevant: a biblical rule's justification or argument is more weighty than the rule itself.[4] An earlier listing of criteria from a leading Christian ethicist, Lisa Cahill, also leaves little room for ethics through rules (and principles):[5]

1. …the New Testament itself emerges from, makes sense of, and forms a community of discipleship and moral practice;

2. The contribution of the Bible to ethics is at the level of community-formation, not primarily at that of rules or principles;

3. Both historically and normatively, the connection between the moral 'meant' and 'means' is the community, which seeks analogous expressions of its life;

4. Christian solidarity and equality challenge exploitative socioeconomic relationships that cause some to be deprived of basic necessities of life;

5. Praxis is the criterion or verification of ethical claims and injunctions (epistemology is grounded in praxis);

6. This approach makes a defense against relativist self-enclosure by noting that in reality there never have been nonpolitical, nonperspectival criteria of truth and by recognizing that Christian community overlaps and interacts with other communities both in identity formation and in social transformation.

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[4] Charles H. Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). Other than his **Rule of Purpose**, he offers the following additional four rules:
Rule of Analogy: analogical reasoning, in which one establishes how similar two cases are, is the key to the use of biblical ethics to today.
Rule of Countercultural Witness: the more a biblical teaching or practice differs from the predominant view of the culture, the more significance should be attached to it for biblical theology and ethics today.
Rule of Non-Scientific Scope: Scripture does not have an authoritative status in matters of science.
Rule of Moral-Theological Adjudication: Theological and moral reasoning may be imposed on passages of scripture with alternative exegetical possibilities. This rule gets at the heart of Cosgrove's postmodern assumption that readers typically impose their own reading strategy and interpretations on texts.
[5] Lisa S. Cahill, 'The New Testament and Ethics', *Interpretation* 44.4 (October, 1990): pp. 394-395. See pages 394f.

This essay is an attempt to expand the suggestions for the contemporary use of norms in scripture first articulated by three former professors of mine: David Scholer, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, the last two of whom put their thoughts into print in their widely translated *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*.[6]   Their list of seven criteria for determining whether biblical norms are transcultural is as follows:

1. One should first distinguish between the central core of the message of the Bible and what is dependent upon or peripheral to it.

2. …one should be prepared to distinguish between what the New Testament itself sees as inherently moral and what is not.

3. One must make special note of items where the New Testament itself has a uniform and consistent witness and where it reflects differences.

4. It is important to be able to distinguish within the New Testament itself between principle and specific application.

5. It might also be important, as much as one is able to do this with care, to determine the cultural options open to any New Testament writer.

6. One must keep alert to possible cultural differences between the first and twentieth centuries that are sometimes not immediately obvious.

7. One must finally exercise Christian charity at this point.

This helpful discussion leaves room for expansion, both in relation to other pertinent literature and the criteria themselves.   Grant Osborne's discussion of supracultural principles in contextualisation offers a more recent look at the question and will be used here.[7] My twelve criteria, with their subpoints, are offered as ways in which to develop arguments one way or the other.   Building arguments[8] through these criteria becomes the task

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[6] Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, 2nd ed. (Bletchley, UK: Scripture Union, 1994), pp. 70-76.

[7] Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), pp. 326-332. This includes a good discussion of some others focused on this question of transcultural normative authority: James Olthius, *A Hermeneutics of Ultimacy: Peril or Promise* (NY: University Press of America, 1987); J. Robertson McQuilkin, 'Limits of Cultural Interpretation', *JETS* 23.2, pp. 113-124 and 'Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent', in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Academie Books, 1984), pp. 217-240; William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988); Donald Carson, 'Reflections on Contextualization: A Critical Appraisal of Daniel von Allmen's 'Birth of Theology',' *East African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 3.1, pp. 16-59 and 'A Sketch of the Factors Determining Current Hermeneutical Debate in Cross-Cultural Contexts', in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, ed. D. A. Carson (Nashville: Nelson), pp. 11-29; Charles R. Taber, 'Hermeneutics and Culture: An Anthropological Perspective', in *Gospel and Culture*, ed. John R. W. Stott and R. T. Coote (Pasedena: William Carey Library, 1979), pp. 109-131; and Charles Kraft, 'Interpreting in Cultural Context', *JETS* 21.4, pp. 357-367.

[8] In this way I see this discussion as a matter of *rhetoric* in the classical sense. Aristotle defined rhetoric as an art (cf. *The Art of Rhetoric*, I.1) for discovering the means of persuasion (*Rhetoric* I.2.2). The *Ad Herrenium* states that 'the task of the public speaker is to discuss capably those matters which law and

of the Christian community seeking moral discernment through the scriptures.

Twelve Criteria for Determining Transcultural Norms or Culturally Relative Teaching in Scripture[9]

1. Criterion of Contextual Dissimilarity and Traditional Consistency

A biblical norm that is dissimilar to its cultural context and consistent with its own tradition will more likely be transcultural. For example, homosexuality was uniquely forbidden by Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman world, which accepted the practice. Grant Osborne offers three hermeneutical steps that I would apply to this criterion:[10]

a. Look for supracultural indicators in the biblical passage;
b. Determine to what extent biblical commands are attached to cultural practices;
c. Note the distance between supracultural and cultural indicators.

Yet dissimilarity to cultural context is insufficient to determine normativity: Paul forbids eating meat in idol temples but permits Christians to eat meat from the marketplace which has been offered to idols – idolatry and Christian community, not counter-cultural behaviour, are the issues. N. T. Wright has qualified the classic criterion of dissimilarity in Gospel studies, which looks only for dissimilarity, with his criterion of double similarity/dissimilarity:

> when something can be seen to be credible (though perhaps deeply subversive) within first-century Judaism, *and* credible as the implied starting point (though not the exact replica) of something in later Christianity, there is a strong possibility of our being in touch with the genuine history of Jesus.[11]

Wright directs us to the need to understand arguments not just in terms of cultural context but also in relation to tradition. With this additional observation, we still see that homosexuality is normatively proscribed by both Judaism and the Church in the 1st century.

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custom have fixed for the uses of citizenship, and to secure as far as possible the agreement of his hearers' (I.1.2 in [Cicero], *Ad C. Herennium, De Ratione Dicendi*, trans. Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 5.

[9] My first seven criteria are based on Norman Perrin's four criteria for establishing (historical) authenticity in the Gospels in his *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (NY: Harper & Row, 1976): Criterion of Dissimilarity (relating to my first three criteria), Criterion of Multiple Attestation (relating to my criteria four and five), and Criterion of Coherence, Criterion of Language and Environment.

[10] Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, pp. 328-329.

[11] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 132.

2. Criterion of Available Alternatives

Where no choice really exists for actions or perspectives in a culture or context, the point may be situational and not transcultural. This is one of Fee and Stuart's points, and their examples are that 1st century culture offered little alternative to slavery and the role of women.[12] The NT accepts these as given institutions of the time and seeks to live with them. This does not entail an endorsement of the institutions *per se*. Nor does it suggest that one cannot live radically within given institutions in a culture (cf. Philemon; Eph. 5.21ff). Similarly, early Christian teaching on the relation of Christians to the state or government understood this relationship in terms of 'submission' (Rom. 13.1; 1 Pt. 2.13f). Democracy today makes the average citizen responsible for government and not only accepts but even solicits political activism on the part of its citizens.

3. Criterion of Repeatability[13]

If something can be repeated in the same way under different circumstances, its authority may well be transcultural.[14] Hebrews uses this criterion negatively to say that, if the priests change, the Law must change as well – one cannot continue to repeat the same laws as before (Heb. 7.12). This supports Christian rethinking of the applicability of Old Testament laws for their new circumstances. Paul uses this criterion positively to establish that righteousness comes through faith, not works of the Law, since this was the case with Abraham and David – before and after Moses – in the scriptures (Rom. 4.1-8). Moses, too, can testify to this righteousness by faith as opposed to righteousness by works (Paul quotes Deuteronomy in Rom. 10.5-8); but Israel, on the other hand, failed to attain righteousness because they strove for it not on the basis of faith but of works (Rom. 9.31-32).

This criterion might also be used by the Church today. We need to understand the relationship between a biblical norm and its social context and look for ways in which the norm might or might not function in the same way in our social context[15]. If it cannot function the same way today, it is not (at least in its present form) transcultural. This is actually why most sexual norms *are* transcultural – there is little about the social

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[12] Fee and Stuart, pp. 75f – criterion 5.

[13] This is a foundational test in science: an experiment must be repeatable.

[14] Note I. H. Marshall: '...*we are no longer forced to take literally commands which are no longer applicable in changed circumstances.*' (I. Howard Marshall, 'Using the Bible in Ethics', in *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics*, Ed. David F. Wright (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), p. 52).

[15] Lisa S. Cahill presents this argument – to look at the relationship between biblical ethics and the social setting of the community – in 'New Testament and Ethics', *Interpretation* 44.4 (October, 1990): pp. 383-395. She writes, '...a criterion of the 'coherence' of Christian ethics must be analogous conformity to the paradigmatic social challenges that the first Christian communities presented historically' (p. 393).

situation that has bearing on our sexual relationships. Indeed, Paul notes that sexual sin is not a social sin but a sin against one's body (1 Cor. 6.18), which belongs to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6.19f). On the other hand, one may well argue that in many cultures today, a woman teaching from the scripture simply does not repeat the situation of the first century: this does not appear to be a case of a woman exercising a domineering authority over men (cf. 1 Tim. 2.12).

4. Criterion of Multiple Attestation

The case for transcultural normativity is stronger the more we can demonstrate that there are multiple witnesses or proofs. This age-old criterion from the law courts might be applied to the scriptures as follows:

a. *Multiple authors* saying the same thing. References in various NT authors to the practice of baptism suggests it is a significant early church practice, even though Paul is glad that he did not baptise many of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1.14-17). That John is the only author to mention foot washing suggests that it is not a practice in the early church and not one to be repeated today.

b. *Multiple occurrences*, even if in the same author, of the same point.[16] Paul's insistence that the Law does not make one righteous but increases the trespass is a case in point (e.g., Rom. 2.20; 7.5-6; 1 Cor. 15.56; Gal. 3.19-24), and it is corroborated by Acts 13.39 and Heb. 7.19.

c. *Multiple cultures* (e.g., Jewish, Greco-Roman):[17] Women rarely divorced their husbands in Jewish culture, but divorce initiated by men and women was common in the Greco-Roman world. Yet Jesus' prohibition of divorce is not softened for the Greco-Roman context and is made to include divorce initiated by women in Mk. 10.11-12. Similarly, homosexuality was not uncommon in the Greco-Roman context, and pederasty was a common practice. But the apostle to the Gentiles does not reconsider Jewish opposition to homosexuality (Lev. 18.22): he makes of it the quintessential example of how sin grips the human 'mind' so that it considers the unnatural act to be perfectly natural (Rom. 1.26f).

d. *Multiple periods* in salvation history (e.g., Abrahamic *and* Mosaic covenants, OT *and* NT). Paul's argument regarding the end of the Law depends on his argument regarding the relationship between Abraham, Moses and Christ (e.g., Gal. 3). He finds grace, not law, is the repeated

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[16] Grant Osborne lists this sort of point as a general principle to follow: 'Individual statements must be placed within the broader context of Scripture as a whole' (*Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 330).

[17] This point assumes prior exegetical work to determine 'the original setting and meaning of a command' – one of Grant Osborne's general principles for determining supracultural principles and practices (*Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 330).

foundation for theology in different periods of salvation history. On this criterion, we need to challenge the reading of scripture favouring the view that the land of Palestine belongs to the Jews and not the Palestinians, for what is promised Israel in the prophets is seen in the NT as provisional and applicable to God's 'people', the Church, by New Testament writers. On the other hand, Paul has to argue with the Corinthians that Christian freedom does not mean the OT understanding of sexual sin no longer applies (1 Cor. 5-6).

e. *Multiple genres* in scripture which make the same point. Using this criterion negatively, note on the one hand that Psalm 103.3 says God 'heals all your diseases'. A prosperity teaching makes this normative, suggesting that Christians should not suffer long from any disease (or even get sick). Yet Paul in his letters very unspiritually, on such a view, suggests to Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach and frequent ailments (1 Tim. 5.23) and understands his own chronic illness as divinely ordained (2 Cor. 12.7).

This example raises an important point about genre and authority: one must understand that *not all genres carry the same weight in theological and moral argument*. Grant Osborne says that 'didactic passages should be used to interpret historical passages',[18] and John Goldingay argues that, because the primary function of narratives is to witness to what God has done and who He is, they point us more to God's deeds than to our obligations.[19] These are good rules of thumb which call for further discussion about the proper interpretation of other genres in scripture.

5. Criterion of Different Authorities

(Similar to the last criterion, this one focuses specifically on four types of authority in ethical argument.) Support for an argument is explicitly or implicitly defensible on the basis of different types of authority. *The more agreement that can be established within and between different types of authority (rules, principles, paradigms, world view),[20] the more likely the norm is transcultural.*

a. **Rules**:[21] Rules sound absolute, but their usual lack of explanation and their very specificity leave open the question of how they are to be

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[18] Grant Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 330.

[19] John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 56ff.

[20] Cf. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 209.

[21] In this discussion, I am only considering rules *as they appear in the Bible* and am asking the hermeneutical question, 'how do we interpret these for our life today?'. I am not trying to address the debate among moral ethicists about what *new* laws, rules, or norms should guide Christians. Thus I am not affirming an ethic of norms – a whole way of thinking about Christian life from the perspective of norms and a way of making moral decisions based on norms – such as we find in Norman Geisler's *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971). Geisler produces his own principles – norms – for deciding what action to take in a difficult situation.

applied to different situations. They do function as examples and so are meant to be adapted to similar situations: laws function within a legal system and are representative of key concerns.[22] But their specificity may also limit their applicability, even their application in the same situation. The law, not to glean the remainder of grapes from one's vineyard (Deut. 24.21), is meant as a social obligation to help the poor. In some situations, being content to help the poor in this particular way would not fulfil the intent of this law. The prohibition against adult male homosexuality in Lev. 18.22 raises the question whether this rule is transcultural or, like Lev. 19.27 ('You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard'), culturally specific and relative. Something more than single rules taken apart from a larger ethic are required. In the case of homosexuality, an understanding of how rules relate to biblical views on marital faithfulness and sexuality in general makes this rule binding for all times.

Moreover, laws are of various types in the OT: judicial law may carry social penalties, whereas moral law may not, yet both might describe actions reprehensible before God.[23] The penalties described for judicial law are often cultural and/or suggestive to those in authority to apply the law, whereas the norm itself may be transcultural.

What helps to establish these norms as transcultural is setting these laws within a larger ethical understanding, to see how they are embedded within a given law code, tradition, and overall ethic. This can be accomplished, in part, by asking how a norm is to be applied, specified and balanced, as James Childress advocates.[24]

***Application**: Relating a norm to a case. We need to know the *scope* of the norm's applicability, the *a priori weight* of the norm, and that the norm does not conflict with other norms. The next two approaches may help in this determination.

***Specification**: E.g., no divorce, *except* in the case of sexual immorality; similarly, one finds specifications (qualifications) for not

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[22] This point is clearly and helpfully illustrated with respect to Lev. 19 by Richard Bauckham in his chapter 'Holiness for the People' in *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), pp. 20-40.

[23] Bauckham notes that theft is treated in Lev. 19 under a moral, not judicial law; also, Lev. 19.20-22 has a different judicial handling of the rape of a slave woman from that of a free woman (judicial penalties may vary in the two cases because of social custom), but both are viewed as sin before God (*The Bible in Politics*, pp. 34f).

[24] James Childress, 'Moral Norms in Practical Ethical Reflection', in *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects*, eds. Lisa Cahill and James Childress (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1996): pp. 196-217.

lying, killing, and so forth. Specification helps to adjust 'the conditions of application by attention to range and scope'.[25]

*__Balancing__: '…. balancing adjusts the weight or strength of competing moral norms so that one can outweigh or override another.'[26] 'Arrayed from the most stringent to the least stringent, norms may be construed as: (a) absolute, (b) lexically ordered (i.e., some are absolute relative to some but not all others), (c) prima facie binding, and (d) illuminative rules of thumb. Much of the debate concerns which norms have which degree of prescriptivity.'[27] I would apply this point to Paul's argument on eating food sacrificed to idols. It shows that he agrees with the position of the 'strong' but is open to other's beliefs (the 'weak'): what matters for him is not so much the theological position in this matter as the way in which people treat one another (1 Cor. 8.1-11.1; cf. arguments over Jewish / Gentile practices in Rom. 14.1-15.13).

b. __Virtues, Values, and Principles__: In contrast to the specificity of rules, principles aim at a wider application. Paul lays down a principle for Christians to apply to enable change in their lives as they become Christians: 'Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called' (1 Cor. 7.20). This can apply to marriage, singleness, and slavery. Similarly, virtues are used to put rules in their rightful place. Jesus countered the application of certain rules in the Law with virtues (being merciful, forgiving) or values (e.g., kingdom) that interpret the laws: Mt. 9.13; 12.7 (quoting Hos. 6.6 – mercy, not sacrifice; cf. Jesus' teaching on 'forgiveness', e.g., Mt. 18.21ff), Mt. 22.37-40 (the Law and prophets hang on the 'law', really a value, of love: love of God and love of one's neighbour as oneself). Jesus' principle, 'Do to others as you would they do to you', _is_ the law and the prophets (Mt. 7.12).

Values similarly put rules in their place.[28] The law on gleaning (Deut. 24.21) is meant as a concrete example of valuing the stranger, widow and orphan – a key value in the Mosaic Law Code. To the extent that rules and virtues, values and/or principles might be lined up, one has an increasingly strong case that the point under discussion is transculturally normative, as well as a way of understanding how it is to be applied to specific cases. The cultural specificity of the law on gleaning lines up

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[25] James Childress, 'Moral Norms in Practical Ethical Reflection', p. 210.

[26] James Childress, 'Moral Norms in Practical Ethical Reflection', p. 210.

[27] James Childress, 'Moral Norms in Practical Ethical Reflection', p. 210. E.g., deontologists often argue that a norm on _autonomy_ overrides a norm on _benificence_ (p. 210; a patient may choose not to have life-saving surgery – my example).

[28] We must, of course, be clear that we are working with _biblical_ values and rules and are careful in our exegesis, as Donald Carson well argues in _Exegetical Fallacies_ (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984). Note his figures 6 and 7 on pp. 111-114 in making this point.

with the value of the powerless and needy in society *in some cultures*; in other cultures, the value underlying the law may need to be reapplied in new laws. Walter Kaiser has offered an important discussion of how to associate Old Testament laws with principles.[29]

c. Key Narrative Paradigms:

*These are essentially arguments from identity (who we are determines what we ought to do), derived from association with a particular story.[30] The relationship between the narrative and the paradigm is a matter of interpretation which takes one beyond mere application of rules and principles to understanding the significance of characters, actions and plot in a story for one's own life. The narrative is 'transcultural', since it is owned by a whole group (all creation, all Jews, all Christians), but identifying specific actions to be taken may be relative. The following major biblical narratives help to define Christian identity and therefore interpret more specific directives in scripture: creation, Israel, Jesus (and the Gospel), and the Church and its mission.[31]

*The paradigm of Jesus is primary among the other key paradigms: the Kingdom's coming may lead some to forego marriage, which so well fits the creation narrative (Mat. 19.12; cf. Lk. 14.26); the paradigm of Jesus

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[29] Walter Kaiser, 'How Can Christians Derive Principles From the Specific Commands of the Law?' in Clark and Rakestraw, *Readings in Christian Ethics*, Vol. I, pp. 192-201 (See also Bauckham's discussion of looking for principles behind laws in *The Bible in Politics*, pp. 20-40). Here is Kaiser's argument in brief:

1. The specificity of the OT laws does not prejudice their use in other situations.

2. Discover middle axioms (more general than rules, less general than principles) or principles which show how to apply laws to different contexts.

3. Work with a 'ladder of abstraction' (with reference to William Twining and David Miers, *How to Do Things with Rules* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), p. 45). Kaiser offers the following table by way of example:

The Ladder of Abstraction

Ancient Specific Situation	BC Specific Situation	Institutional & Personal Norm	**General Principle**	Theological and Moral Principle	New Testament Specific Situation	Modern Specific Situation
Feed those who work for you	Oxen tread wheat (Dt. 25.4)	Animals are gifts from God for the service of mankind. Be kind to those serving you.	Giving engenders gentleness and graciousness in humans.	'Love your neighbour' (and Ninth Commandment: do not bear false witness)	Paul could be paid for preaching (1 Cor. 9.10-12)	Pay those who minister the Word to you.
Level of Specificity			Level of Generality			Level of Specificity

[30] Cf. Rollin G. Grams, 'From Being to Doing: The Identity of God's People as the Ground for Building a Christian Social Ethic', *Transformation* 18.3 (July, 2001): pp. 155-171.

[31] By listing these four narratives, I am following Ben Witherington, III, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), p. 5.

clarifies what is expendable in the Israelite narrative (e.g., Phl. 3.8-10). Indeed, it establishes the Church's identity (e.g., Eph. 2.1-22).

d. World View:

*Scripture as a whole sets up a Christian worldview. As Hays notes, this fourth use of scripture pertains to God's identity and our understanding of the human situation before Him.[32] Yet we might also speak of a meta-narrative of (1) God's good initiative (e.g., creation, always involving relationship with Him) (2) which is abused or broken by human sinfulness, (3) which inevitably results in God's punishment and (4) his new good initiative, by grace alone, which offers salvation.[33] This meta-narrative plays over and over again in scripture through the various narratives of scripture, especially in the larger narratives of creation and the fall, Israel's history, Jesus' story in creation, Israel and cosmic history, and the Church's story in the world. It answers the questions *Who is God? Who are we, God's people? Who are we in relation to the rest of the world?*

These four types of authority are listed in *ascending order of significance* for establishing what is transcultural. A virtue (e.g., being merciful) might interpret or overturn a law, but not vice-versa; a paradigm might explain a principle or a narrative a virtue and value; a worldview makes sense of a narrative.

6. Criterion of Theological and Ethical Coherence

An argument is more likely transcultural if it coheres with other theological and ethical ideas and practices and can be shown to cohere with both theology and ethics. The ethical commands of the Sermon on the Mount do not allow for exceptions in order to make them 'liveable' in a sinful world. But this accords well with the underlying theological conviction that the Kingdom of Heaven is present, that the time of the 'new covenant' ethics for the restored remnant of Israel has arrived. Jesus uses this argument when altering Deut. 24's teaching on divorce (Mk. 10.1ff): the new theological perspective of the Kingdom calls for a new ethic in harmony with the narrative of creation, not laws accommodating human sinfulness. Paul insists that ethics should cohere with theology in Rom. 14.23: 'But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they

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[32] Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the NT*, p. 209.

[33] Or, as James M. Scott suggests, the Old Testament has a 'sin-exile-restoration' theme running through it, and this is picked up in the New Testament. Cf. his 'For as Many as are of Works of the Law are under a Curse' (Galatians 3.10)' in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, *JSNTSS* 83, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) pp. 187-221.

do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin' (NRSV).

In challenging the Corinthians' misunderstanding of the Christian's relation to the end times, Paul challenges their belief that they had reached a perfect level of spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 8.1ff) and life in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12.1ff), that they did not need a doctrine of a future resurrection (1 Cor. 15.12), and that what they did with their bodies (belonging to the old era) made no difference for such spiritual people (1 Cor. 5, 6, and 7). No doubt this amounted to disrespect for a suffering apostle such as Paul, who presents his struggles in life as credentials for ministry rather than as evidence of his lack of spirituality. What Paul corrects in 1 Corinthians is the triumphal theology of the Corinthians that has also led them to an undesirable ethic. The same triumphal theology of the prosperity teaching today leads to an ethic at variance from what we find in Paul's letters.

7. Criterion of Rhetorical Exigence or Contingency

A response to a specific situation might be a culturally relative or situational response. There is good reason to attend to the contingency of the situation in Paul's words about women in 1 Tim. 2.11-15.[34] Language in this passage which sounds transcultural (arguments about the way things are in creation or after the Fall, the use of absolutist language) but is directed to a situation (note 1 Tim. 4.3; 5.11-15; 2 Tim. 3.6-7; cf. 4.3-4) may need to be understood as contextual rather than normative. Compare Paul's approval of 'Cretans are always liars' (Titus 1.12) when faced with a similar false teaching as in 1 and 2 Timothy. Also, an innovative approach to hair or head-coverings in the Corinthian church is opposed with rather transculturally normative sounding rhetoric (1 Cor. 11.2-16) on the basis of (1) nature and (2) the practice of all the churches, and yet few churches today accept Paul's regulation, spoken to a specific situation, as transcultural. Today, Christians accept that Paul's regulations for slaves (e.g., 1 Cor. 7.21; Col. 3.22-25; Eph. 6.5-8; 1 Tim. 6.1-2 (note the absolutist language of 6.3ff) – even sending a run-away slave back to his master (Philemon)) – are situational responses which must be understood as culturally relative and not normative. Yet in Paul's day they were 'normative' for the Church, for these words responded to the given situation of the day (cf. 1 Pet. 2.18-25). With such examples before us, this criterion emphasises that the interpreter needs a more complete argument on the basis of other criteria to move beyond seeing the argument as

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[34] E.g., Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus,* Good News Commentary (NY: Harper & Row, 1984): Paul 'is here prohibiting women to teach in the (house-) church(es) of Ephesus, although in other churches they prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5) and probably give a teaching from time to time (1 Cor. 14:26), and in Titus 2:3-4 the older women are expected to be good teachers of the younger ones' (p. 36).

culturally relative or situational. On the other hand, sin lists, particularly a long sin list in a letter to a congregation Paul has not visited – Rom. 1.29-31 – are, on this criterion, more likely to be transculturally normative for the Church.

Grant Osborne's five 'specific principles' for determining what is relative and what is supracultural could be related to some other points I have made, but they also fit under this particular point:[35]

a. Try to determine the extent to which the underlying theological principle dominates the surface application;

b. See when the writer depends on traditional teaching or, on the other hand, applies a temporary application to a specific cultural problem;

c. When the teaching transcends the cultural biases of the author and readers, it is more likely to be normative;

d. If the command is wholly tied to a cultural situation, it is not timeless in itself;

e. Commands that by nature are moral or theological will be closely tied to the divine will.

8. Criterion of the Author's Emphasis

The more the point is dwelt upon or made passionately, the more likely the conviction is crucial and therefore transcultural. That Paul chooses homosexuality to illustrate the nature of sin and the extent to which human depravity has sunk suggests that this is not a culturally relative perspective (Rom. 1.18ff). On the other hand, Paul sees three levels of argument regarding lawsuits in the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 6.1ff): the Corinthian practice of going to the law courts (which Paul argues against); setting up judges in the Church to hear lawsuits (which has acceptable eschatological and scriptural arguments in its favour); and foregoing justice (Paul's preferred approach, being based on Jesus' example). He thus overturns an earlier argument of his own in favour of a cruciform way of thinking that pervades the argument of 1 Corinthians. The emphasis on the cross in Paul's theology and ethics repeatedly comes to the surface in his letters.

9. Criterion of Listening to Other Authorities

For an argument to be transculturally applicable it should be tested on other grounds of authority than scripture alone: Church tradition and community, reason, and experience. The point of this criterion is not to undermine scripture's authority as God's Word. But it is to acknowledge

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[35] Grant Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, pp. 330-332.

that our interpretation of scripture is influenced by other factors than exegesis alone, and that one's life as a Christian is within a larger context than simply an individual reading the Bible in private. Thus submitting interpretations to tests of other authorities may raise questions about whether we have indeed rightly read the scriptures.

10. Criterion of Meaning, Implications, Significance and Applications

The greater the interpreter can establish a relationship between the meaning of scriptural texts, their theological and ethical implications, and the significance they bear on a given situation, the greater one can argue that the application has transculturally normative authority.[36] For example, a right understanding of various texts having to do with God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (*meaning*) has led the Church to the doctrine of the Trinity (*implication*), the *significance* of which is often explored in theology, doxology, ethics, hermeneutics, and *applied* to a specific matter at hand. At each point one must ask whether there is a valid argument (i.e., from meaning to implications to significance to application). Another example might be looking for what implications Gen. 2.24 (the man and the woman become one flesh) has for sexual ethics (ruling out sex with prostitutes, 1 Cor. 6.16), marital love and the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5.31), and marriage and divorce (Mk. 10.8f), or other applications of this text for sexual ethics which are not noted in scripture (e.g., an understanding of sexuality which speaks against homosexuality, pre-marital sex, adultery)?

11. Criterion of Central and Peripheral

What is central in scripture is transculturally authoritative; what is peripheral in scripture is of relative authority. While this criterion can be highly subjective, Paul himself argues for the peripheral importance of speaking in tongues among other gifts for the Church, using the criteria of what is upbuilding, encouraging, and consoling (1 Cor. 14.3). If Plato thought that *justice* was the chief virtue ordering other virtues (*Republic*), Augustine followed a more biblical emphasis (e.g., Mk. 12.29-31; Rom. 13.8-10; 1 Cor. 13; Col. 3.12-14) on *love* (e.g., *Epist.* CXL.2.4; *Homilies on 1 Jn.* 7.8).

This criterion entails finding the right emphasis among the numerous laws, rules, and imperatives of the Bible. This involves us in tasks of

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[36] This criterion is based on E. D. Hirsch's discussion of the 'meaning' of meaning and his suggestion that we distinguish between meaning, implications, and significance. See *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

interpretation as well as entering into the biblical authors' *spirituality*.[37] Moreover, it requires understanding the 'spirit' of scripture's norms, laws and imperatives. As Richard Bauckham says, we must remember that the OT law is a 'reforming' law, in process of shaping Israel in her historical and cultural context and her place in salvation history, and not simply treat it as a final blue-print for God's society.[38]

12. Criterion of Relational Theology

Theology is not, in the end, a matter of doctrines or ethical norms but of a relationship with God. No criteria can replace this fundamental point, for relationships are much more than right beliefs and behaviour.[39]

*Jesus' ethic points beyond laws to a relationship of love, forgiveness, and inclusion through redemption – e.g., 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' (Hos. 6.6, quoted in Mt. 9.13; 12.7). Ethics of any sort needs to find its place within this *telos* of our relationship to God. Merely focusing on relationship in some abstract way, of course, leads to a liberal interpretation of love; understanding that this relationship is with a holy and just God will clarify how it is that love requires sacrifice, suffering, repentance, forgiveness, and redemption.

*Ethics is also relational in the sense that it involves God's power in our lives. If moral norms precede our relationship to God – legalism – they undermine the powerful grace of God and his freedom as God to act, not through some legal procedure, but on the basis of his character and relationship with us, e.g., as Father to us, his little children. This point is made in different ways in the narratives of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22), Job, and Jonah. I would not argue that these narratives point to God's unpredictability but to the relational over systematic nature of theology. Every real relationship deconstructs systematic classifications of that relationship. Norms are not only embedded in a *living* tradition but part of and serving of *relationships*. Our use of norms in the churches today must be in service of a theology to do with improving our relationship with God and each other, not legalism.

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[37] Here I only have space to note this important concern, as discussed in Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Note the first essay and pp. 11-14 in particular.

[38] Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*, pp. 36f.

[39] At this point I would agree with Stephen Barton. Although he is opposed to the application of categorical imperatives from scripture to today, he rightly emphasises that Christian ethics is about seeking to live life under 'the one true God revealed in Jesus Christ' ('The Epistles and Christian Ethics' in *The Cambridge Companion To Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 63.

Conclusion

These criteria commend themselves in offering consistency in our use of biblical norms today. They allow for biblical diversity and the variety of readers' contexts without concluding that such admissions necessitate doing ethics without norms. They offer a way to discuss change in norms – even the handling of uncomfortable biblical norms – without simply saying that they are not to our liking. It seems to me that through such an exercise in the Christian community's prudential use of norms in scripture we will be able to affirm biblical authority while accounting for its contextual nature, and only in this way will we be able to become *communities of moral discourse* which truly listen to scripture as its primary authority in ethics.

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Hermeneutics, Biblical Ethics and Christian Witness

Are there any universal Christian norms, valid for all contexts, which can be derived from scripture? Should scripture be universally normative also for the *witness* of the community of disciples? Rollin Grams convincingly argues that there are indeed norms which are authoritative for different contexts and proposes specific hermeneutical principles by which these may be established. He also links ethics and mission, in referring to the 'church's mission and identity', but does so rather in passing instead of developing it more fully in his articles.[1] In my response to the articles, I would like to explore further this connection between ethics and the witnessing role of the community.

The Christian community's responsibility to witness[2] lies at the heart of Christian ethics. By 'witness' I mean the impact on society effected by people's turning to the triune God and starting a lifelong journey of a disciple in community, thus confessing the essence of the triune God and his rule in their lives. For the community of disciples we call 'church', there is more than a mere *connection* between ethics and witness; one is unthinkable without the other. Because in dealing with the question of ethics, as Grams does in his articles, we touch upon the very centre of a disciple's role of being a witness.

Rollin Grams agrees with Richard Hays that ethics has to do with the moral vision of a community, a community which 'listen[s] to scripture as its primary authority in ethics.'[3] Ethics is what defines a disciple, and ethical decisions of a disciple are a witness to the reign of God in his/her life, already present and yet to come – or they point to the absence of it. Thus, witness needs to be formulated by the same parameters, as Grams asserts: by the 'scripture as God's authoritative Word for the Church' which not only shapes and defines our community's identity but also offers 'norms, rules, laws or obligations.'[4] These, in turn, impact our witness role as disciples. As Grams also notes, the challenge is to do this without moving into legalism, in which the Church becomes defined in terms of

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[1] See R. Grams, 'The Case for Biblical Norms in Christian Ethics,' *JEBS*, Vol. three, No. 3, p. 13, and idem, 'The Use of Biblical Norms in Christian Ethics,' *JEBS,* Vol. four, No. 1, p. 5, fn. 4 on the 'Rule of countercultural witness' and p. 13.

[2] See the summary by David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Orbis, 1992), pp. 457-467 on the term 'witness' in the ecumenical debate. Although there are also some difficulties associated with this term, we continue to use it here with the definition given in the text above, despite the controversial debate in the 20th century and the nuances given to the term.

[3] *JEBS* 4.1, p. 19.

[4] *JEBS* 4.1, p. 4, *JEBS* 3.3, p. 13 respectively.

dogmas and regulations, as many in today's postmodern world perceive it to be, and this to the exclusion of more relational dynamics – such as belonging – that should play a role in shaping the journey of a community of disciples.[5]

Grams endeavours to include all possible steps toward building a solid foundation for ethics and comes up with 'twelve criteria'[6] that function as a checklist for the formulation of Christian ethics based upon the biblical text. His results present a solid approach that can also be applied to the development of a *biblical* understanding of the role of the church, present in and witnessing to the world in which she lives.[7] This *community* is formed and shaped by the text and the context in which it is set.[8]

Is scripture the *exclusive* source for ethics, discipleship and witness? Could not the community also be a source alongside scripture? Being good Protestant evangelicals, we affirm Luther's *sola scriptura* understanding. However, in reality, we all recognise that we live by more than the text alone. Historically, scripture was formed at the same time as the text and thus witnesses to the beginnings of the community when both scripture and community were being shaped by the context, while now both are interpreted from perspectives of various different contexts. Today, all churches refer to their tradition and experience as playing a role in shaping them. Perhaps we should follow the lead of some historic churches, such as the Orthodox Church with its emphasis on the Church Fathers. But as we ask these questions, we move beyond a response to the paper.

Grams engages, with the 'twelve criteria', in a discussion of 1) what in scripture is culturally bound, although still possibly offering some guidelines or principles for today's community; 2) what is bound to a situation which we today may not even be able to reconstruct; and 3) what is transcultural and universal and so still applicable for today's ethics of a

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[5]At the EBF Mission Secretaries' Conference in Fuzine, Croatia, June 19 - 22 2003, Darrell Jackson presented UK studies of people's attitudes about the Church, which reflected this view, and offered suggestions for new church models and alternative ways for people to get acquainted with Christianity that would help to bridge the gap of alienation.

[6] The larger part of the second essay 'The Use of Biblical Norms in Christian Ethics' is devoted precisely to the introduction and explanation of the criteria. *JEBS* 4.1, pp. 4-19.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Given the call of the Christian community to live in the midst of other peoples and cultures, the responsibility to witness cannot be limited only to the New Testament, as Grams underlines in his article. We need to look also at the community's responsibility as it has been communicated in the Old Testament: a servant stewardship for our environment, an influence in the political world, an alternative position to the power struggles between nations, etc. The book by J. Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), shows that ethics and witness have many other issues in common that traditionally would not be looked at together, such as, for instance, 'justice for the poor', or 'care of the environment'.

discipling community in all of our various contexts. These issues lead us beyond the article to look for other components that also need to be considered in the effort to discern not only norms and principles, but also the essence of biblical discipleship and witness.
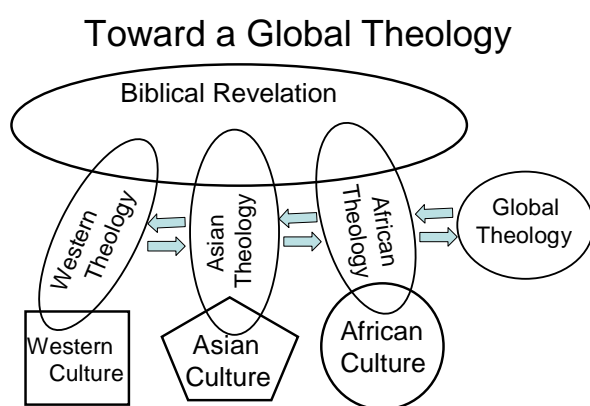
Transcultural global and local community ethics and witness

One's reading of a biblical text is shaped by the community and the context, as Grams demonstrates. So to read the text and from it develop a transcultural, i.e. applicable in various contexts, ethic for a community of disciples in their primary role of presence and witness to the rule of God is crucial. It is quite challenging, because of the variety of contexts in which the communities live, contexts in which ethical issues vary. At a recent BWA mission summit, an African theologian, Douglas Waruta,[9] provoked the western missionaries who debate at length about the topic of homosexuality, a topic which is very difficult in the church, trying not to simplify it into absolutist categories. He brought an African perspective on the issue, describing how missionaries introduce this 'hot' topic (from a western perspective) into Africa, the so-called 'mission field', with elaborate explanations of its complexity, while polygamy, a topic that Africans are deeply struggling with, seems so simple for western missionaries. From the Africans' point of view, when they finally received the scripture and could read and interpret it in their own right, they found that it seemed to be exactly the opposite of the western missionaries' interpretation: it was to them very clear how homosexuality is treated in biblical ethics and how much more open-ended and complex is the topic of polygamy as presented in scripture. This also applies to other topics – such as bribery, often hotly-debated on the 'mission field' and in the west – where the same issue is looked upon and handled differently and defined differently, depending on the cultural context. So some topics in ethics are transculturally not viewed in the same way, and the interest in a specific topic and its understanding from scripture also dependent on the context.

This leads us to look not only at the text, developed by the context and its community (as much as we can define the community from the text itself), but also at the different readers, their communities and their contexts today. While this is not an argument for the relativity of all ethical issues, there should be a serious search toward a common foundation that will at the same time leave space for the different cultures. There is always a danger that western culture will dominate the way of interpretation, as can be seen in the secular as well as in the Christian global setting. Paul

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[9] Douglas Waruta's presentation on Mission and Culture at the Summit on Baptist Mission in the 21st Century (5-9 May, 2003) in Swanwick, England, with the summit topic 'Reaching the World for Christ'.

Hiebert's illustration, 'Toward a Global Theology',[10] is a helpful illustration for the inclusion of both – the global and the local. The drawing shows how the necessary dialogue on biblical interpretation needs to continue; while searching for a global theology we must still respect local theologies. Picking up on this drawing, as we look at norms and principles in biblical ethics for the witness of disciples, it seems that in our global world we need to work on a *global* disciple's ethics and debate it *together*, while leaving space for the local setting and the witness of disciples to local society.
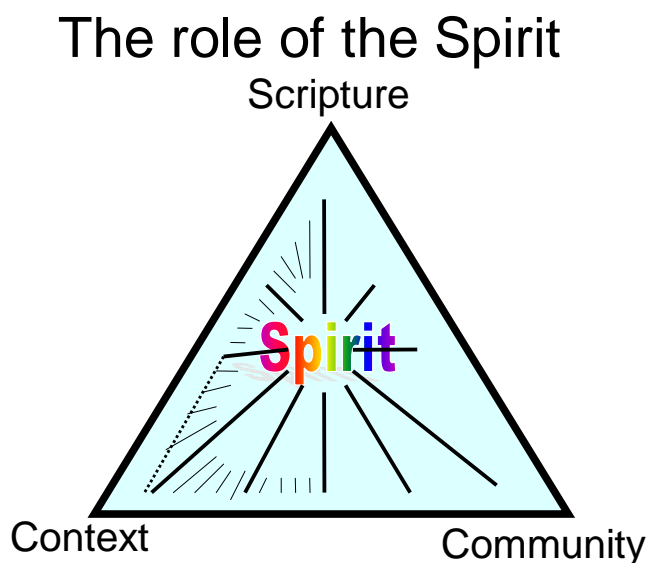

Toward a Global Theology

Holy Spirit, ethics and witness

The role of the Holy Spirit in ethics and witness seems to be limited, if we come from a well-defined system, as we find it in Grams' articles.[11] It calls to mind the scholastic way of a western Protestant approach toward ethics and other biblical disciplines, where there is no space for the mysterious ways of God, such as we find in the Eastern and other non-Western churches. The following illustration, entitled 'The Role of the Spirit',[12] is an attempt to illustrate what we can do in formulating norms and principles from scripture and from where biblical texts have limits, in that they are situated first of all within the context and time of the written text.[13]

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[10] Paul G. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), p. 113.

[11] To be sure, Grams certainly implies the involvement of the Holy Spirit when considering the Church to be a 'community of the Spirit…empowered…for moral discernment,' *JEBS* 3.3, p.16.

[12] Charles van Engen [*Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1996), p. 95] interprets mission by the hermeneutical parameters of three circles of Biblical Text, Urban Context and Faith Community. This paper presents the three areas in a triangle, generalising the model and applying it to different issues.

[13] I make this statement which deliberately contradicts what is a common understanding in order to provoke a rethink, even though in general I agree with positions such as those of Fee, who points out that 'we are concerned about Scripture as the basis for Christian theology and behaviour, and for the application of Scripture that is at once both universal and timeless'. Quoted from Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*, second ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 38.

The role of the Spirit

Scripture

Context   Community

In the illustration, the triangle shows ten main lines, like on a watch, representing the Ten Commandments. There are smaller lines on the left side which depict ethical questions that would fit between the main lines. The small dotted line between the two longer lines and the shorter ones represent additional questions, defining even more issues. But as we continue to define the issues and try to build a set of guidelines, as Rollin Grams importantly does in his article, there is still much that will not let itself be defined clearly. And so, in both the clearly-formulated lines of ethical decisions as well as in those falling in-between, the Holy Spirit is and needs to be involved. This is because the Holy Spirit is the *discipling* Spirit in action, guiding us through questions and issues in ethics – and possibly even challenging some of the principles, roles and standards as generally understood and practised by the communities who read the scripture in their contexts.[14]

Let us formulate this from a mission perspective. We speak about *Christ* as a model in ethics and in witness. In mission, we identify the sending *God* and the missionary *God*. But we need to identify the *Holy Spirit* in the midst and presence of the community – explaining, teaching and leading in areas that have not been defined in scripture, community or context. The Holy Spirit fills the gaps in scripture and actualises the text, which addresses only some issues, while leaving most to the community to discern how to interpret it throughout time and in different contexts.

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[14] See Jesus' comments in the Gospel of John on the promise and the role of the Holy Spirit (John 14-16). Fee rightly affirms 'that God the Holy Spirit will have his way and disabuse us of our prejudices and call us to obedience to God's will', in 'Toward a Common Understanding of 'Hermeneutics' and Normativeness', pp. 41-42.

Interdependence of ethics and witness

Another important topic in the relationship between ethics and witness is their interdependence. Often witness is used as an argument as to why Christians should behave properly.[15] But Christian ethics exists not just for witness; it is for forming a disciple on a journey. But witness can give some different perspectives to the debate on Christian ethics and must not be separated from it.[16] Whenever Christian moral philosophers come from a dominant or majority Christian worldview, it seems that maintaining purity or dominance takes the place of witness; and it becomes possible to justify even the persecution of other Christian or religious communities. In fact, many horrible things, such as the Inquisition, were rooted in excellent theological and ethical foundations of the time.

However, the practice and effect on Christian witness might be an important testing place for such well-formulated ethics. Difficult topics, such as the debate between Christians in relation to non-violence or 'just war' theories, may be rightly discerned only when the disciples' responsibility of witness is put first, that is, when asking what effect the adoption of one position or the other might have on Christian witness. Each position equally claims to be based on a correct interpretation of scripture.[17] But the situation changes when *witness* becomes the testing ground for various neatly-formulated ethical theories which claim to be Bible-based and yet lead to Bible-opposing practice. In such case, eg. the bombing of Iraq, or any military activity where Christians take up weapons against another Christian or non-Christian, the ethical imperative will be seen in a different light. Could such an act be a *positive witness* to the triune God and the result of his reign and presence among his people? Will the Iraq war attract Iraqis or other Muslims to join the Christian community after the war? It makes a difference when the well-formulated philosophy of Christian ethics is scrutinised by praxis, evaluating it in terms of the main role that the Christian community of disciples must play in this world: to witness to and in the world what it means to live under the rule of the triune God and honour his reign.[18]

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[15] And it is probably also one of the reasons why many Christians live and work in a more 'Christian', ethical way in a non-Christian context than in a Christian organisation or church, where everyone expects the other to behave as a Christian.

[16] See both articles by John Driver 'Messianic Evangelisation' (pp. 199-219) and 'The Kingdom of God: Goal of Messianic Mission' (pp. 83-105) in *The Transfiguration of Mission: Biblical, Theological and Historical Foundations*, ed. by Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1993).

[17] And this makes the topic part of mission, as Andrew Kirk has it in his 8th chapter: 'Overcoming Violence and Building Peace', in *What is Mission?, ibid.*

[18] Driver, ibid, pp. 94-95 and Bernhard Ott, *Beyond Fragmentation: Integrating Mission and Theological Education: A Critical Assessment of some Recent Developments in Evangelical Theological Education* (Oxford: Regnum, 2001), p. 206 on 'Mission: From the Margin to the Centre'.

With these comments on the different contextual theologies, the involvement of the Holy Spirit, and the interdependence of Christian ethics and witness, it becomes obvious that for the good of Christian ethics the tension must be maintained between the local and the global, between well-developed formulations of biblical ethical guidelines and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and also in the evaluation of well-argued biblical ethics that need to be tested by the ultimate role of the community of disciples to be a witness to the triune God. I hope that these comments will broaden the discussion of the use of biblical norms in Christian ethics, so ably presented by Rollin Grams in his excellent articles.

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Narratives and Norms: A Response

In a timely series of two successive articles, Dr Rollin Grams engages in an ongoing conversation with the proponents and the critics of narrative moral theology on the relationship between the form of moral life (the narrative) and the explicit expression of the moral values of that form (the moral norms).[1] The series is a compendium of resources for anyone interested in the history and the present state of the art of the debate on the applicability and the meaning of moral norms. It is Grams' graceful and thoughtful service to the academic community, in line with his longstanding interest in mapping the normative value of the New Testament collection of documents concerning the early churches' moral life.[2] While sympathetic to the recent attention of ethicists' to the virtue and character formation of community in academic deliberation on ethical issues,[3] he is critical of the lack of concreteness in applied ethics. Particularly, he is concerned with the question of how the canonical records of the biblical narrative can successfully guide moral decision-making of a contemporary Christian believer. This is a formidable and notoriously difficult task. However, as Richard B. Hays observes, '[u]nless we give a coherent account of how we move between the biblical text and normative ethical judgements, appeals to the authority of Scripture will be hollow and unconvincing'.[4] Grams is attempting to give such a methodologically-challenging account.

In an earlier publication, Grams rightfully, in my opinion, argues for communal and contextual grounds of Christian social ethics.[5] He discerns these grounds in the Christian corporate identification with the vision of the Kingdom and with the community's attempts to mimic the virtues of the Kingdom, while staying in constant moral dialogue on the public square. To put Grams' argument in a proper perspective, one ought to consider this article too.

Moral theology rightfully begins with context and narrative. However, if it ends there, it is in danger of becoming relativistic, a danger keenly felt both by the earliest proponents of narrative theology from H.

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[1] See his 'The Case for Biblical Norms in Christian Ethics', *JEBS,* Volume Three, No. 3 (May 2003) and 'The Use of Biblical Norms in Christian Ethics' in the current issue.

[2] See his 'Gospel and Mission in Paul's Ethics', Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1989, and his 'From Being to Doing: The Identity of God's People as the Ground for Building a Christian Social Ethics', *Transformation* (July, 2001), Vol. 18.3, pp. 155-71. The latter inverses Stanley Grenz's claim that 'Christian ethics … has shown a marked movement from 'doing' to 'being',' [*The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (IVP, 1997), p. 202].

[3] 'The Case for Biblical Norms', p. 13 ff.

[4] 'New Testament Ethics: The Theological Task', *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics,* 1995, pp. 97-120.

[5] 'From Being to Doing', p. 155.

Richard Niebuhr, the 'Yale School' and James Wm. McClendon,[6] as well as by the later admirers and critics of contextual narrativism.[7] On the other hand, there are reasons for the dislike of foundationalist moral discourse based upon quandaries, or moral dilemmas, or 'random-selected' situational or consequential moral norms.[8] Is there a more balanced way?

There have been several attempts to give a positive answer to this question. The earliest was proposed by the radical theologians John Howard Yoder and James Wm. McClendon, and can be discerned in the works of communitarian philosophers and theologians such as Alasdair C. MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas.[9] Yoder rightfully points to the incarnational nature of Christian moral life.

> Christians are not the propagators of a set of abstract and
> impersonal principles received 'by revelation' and needing to be
> passed on in a purely verbal form … Christians are rather witness to
> a person; to God who in Jesus Christ has become our neighbor and
> teacher and servant; a person whom we must in every act either
> confess or disavow; a person from whose full humanity must be
> derived and by whose own personal obedience must be tested every

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[6] For a helpful collection of the formative ideas of the cluster of narrative approaches, see Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (eds.), *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* (reprint, Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997, first published by Eerdmans, 1989). But it unexplainably and lamely fails to include James McClendon's path-breaking essays 'Biography as Theology', in *Cross Currents* 21 (Fall 1971), pp. 415-31 and 'Three Strands of Christian Ethics', in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 6 (Spring 1978), pp. 54-80. On the danger of contextual (apartheid) relativism, see James Wm McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Trinity Press International, 1994, originally published as *Understanding Religious Convictions* by University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 19-35 and *passim*; cf. James Wm. McClendon, Jr, with Nancey Murphy, *Witness: Systematic Theology. Volume 3* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), pp. 49-55.

[7] Glen H. Stassen, while associating himself with the non-foundational moral theologians, writes: 'Yet something strange is happening to us. From H. Richard Niebuhr, to the 'Yale School', to the narrative ethicists, I cannot find a critical understanding of justice that guides us in relating to the vital moral issues of justice and injustice that rack America in our day. It is as if we were above all that.' ['Narrative Justice as Reiteration', in Stanley Hauerwas et al. (eds.), *Theology without Foundations:Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 204]. For a recent critique of the post-foundationalist lack of clear presentation of how scripture fits as 'norm' from a 'critical-realist' (modified foundationalist) evangelical perspective, see Darrell L. Bock, *Purpose-Directed Theology: Getting Priorities Right in Evangelical Controversies* (IVP, 2002), pp. 13-35.

[8] For a recent assessment of the reductive limitations of foundationalism, see Grenz & Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 28-54. For a penetrating perspectivist critique of consequentialistic and quandaristic reasoning, see John H. Yoder, 'Ethics and Eschatology', *Ex Auditu,* Vol. 6 (1990), pp. 119-28; cf. his ' 'Patience' as Method in Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethics of Discipleship 'Absolute'?' in Stanley Hauerwas et al. (eds.), *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 24-42.

[9] For a focused and organised narrative moral discourse which can avoid the pitfalls of moral relativism, McClendon suggests the term 'perspectivism' (see McClendon and Smith 1994, pp. 9, 149-96; cf. McClendon 2000, pp. 52-4). On Yoder's eschatological perspectivism, see his *The Politics of Jesus: Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) and *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); cf. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 239-53.

effort to state Christian ethical guidance in terms of 'norms' and 'principles'. Only as descriptions of who he was do our phrases have any substance and any authority.[10]

Yet, apart from some general suggestions as to how a certain vision, or perspective, renders social practices and orders the moral shape of the life of the followers of the vision, an effective translation of the language of narrative to the explicit language of moral norms had yet to be proposed.

One rare exception is Glen H. Stassen's attempt to use Michael Walzer's political philosophy for the purpose of Christian moral theology.[11] For a particular case of confronting injustice, he attempted a correlation of the biblical narrative of redemption, with the biblical notions of peace and justice and moral norms defined in the language of human rights.[12] Grams has undertaken a similar task. He seeks to define general criteria in which the biblical text witnesses and can be properly tuned to express prescriptive criteria to measure rights and wrongs in the moral life of the Christian community, and by that to make biblical concerns relevant to the moral dilemmas of contemporary life. On the surface, it looks as if we are back to finding the 'right' foundations of moral discourse and therefore Grams' approach could be challenged as random and violating the integrity of the Christian narrative. Can the gap between the narrative, with its implicit moral norms and prescriptive norming, be bridged, so that prescriptive moral language would not violate the coherence of the biblical narrative? Can a prescriptive set of moral norms be harmonised with the metaphorical and descriptive features of the biblical moral vision?

Grams' attempt to bridge the gap is promising and needs to be taken a step further. The leap from the narrative setting of his 'From Being to Doing' with its appeal to the soteriological-eschatological Christian identity and the suggested 'twelve criteria' for the contemporary use of norms in scripture is too stretched. These two levels of ethical discourse do not converse easily with each other, if at all. For example, according to the fourth Criterion of Multiple Attestation by multiple authors, foot washing (recorded in the Gospel of John, ch. 13) in the contemporary church is disposable. Yet different Christian traditions, from the most radical to the universal, stubbornly refuse to give up on the ritual rooted in the power of the Christian narrative of the last meal, as the ultimate sign or a symbolic

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[10] *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 108-9.

[11] In addition to 'Narrative Justice as Reiteration', pp. 201-225, see his 'Michael Walzer's Situated Justice', *Journal of Religious Ethics* (Fall, 1994), pp. 375-99.

[12] See also Glen H. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), *passim*.

act of forgiveness, reconciliation and embrace.[13] The highly sacramental, liturgical, eschatological, and symbolic character of the Fourth Gospel's narrative makes the accidental appearance of the only account of an institution in the Gospel even less probable.[14]

On the other hand, the fifth Criterion of Different Authorities has a striking resemblance to the mode of moral reasoning developed by Stassen to explain his understanding of the nature of Christian moral norms.[15] It leads me to think that there might be a link between the descriptive (convictional) character of the narrative and the overt prescriptive demands of the norms of Christian moral behaviour.[16] Can the connection and subordination of the authority levels of world-view (tradition) – narrative (paradigms) – virtues (principles) – rules, together with the sixth criterion of theological coherence, be a helpful direction to connect norms and context? Particularly, if it would be considered not in a linear (top-down or bottom-up) causal arrangement, but in a holistic web-like supervenient relationship.[17]

It has been widely agreed that the symbolic world of the New Testament narrative[18] converges on the notion of the Kingdom of God; and Grams affirms this.[19] It is 'that' moral vision which defines 'this' moral life. And it is the 'then' of the fulfilment of the vision which verifies the 'now' of everyday living.[20] The challenge is to describe that vision in a tangible and yet holistic manner? It is a task that every generation of

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[13] The Roman Catholic Church fulfils this command at least in the person of the Pope, who, each year at the Paschal season, ceremonially washes the feet of the Cardinals present and of a poor man brought in from the streets of Rome. For a description of the practice customarily practised by a radical Christian community, see James Wm McClendon, Jr. 'With Basin and Towel', in the collection of his sermons *Making Gospel Sense: To a Troubled Church* (The Pilgrim Press, 1995), pp. 31-2.

[14] Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation,* revised ed. (Fortress Press, 1999), p. 530.

[15] Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (IVP, 2003), ch. 'The Form and Function of Moral Norms'.

[16] On the intimate relationship of formative convictions as defined by McClendon, and Stassen's analysis of their normative expression, see my 'East and West: A Theological Conversation,' *JEBS,* Vol. One, No. 1, pp. 34-7.

[17] For a similar argument for a web-like interdependence of virtue-practice-narrative-tradition see Brad J. Kallenberg, 'The Master Argument of MacIntyre's *After Virtue'*, in Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, Mark Thiessen Nation (eds.) *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* (Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 28-9; cf. Stassen & Gushee 2003, pp. 107, 122-4. See also Glen H. Stassen, 'A Social Theory Model for Religious Social Ethics', *Journal of Religious Ethics,* Vol. 5 (Spring, 1977), pp. 9-38. On the role of supervenience in moral reasoning, see Nancey Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics* (WestviewPress, 1997), pp. 193-208.

[18] See Johnson 1999, pp. 1-91.

[19] 'From Being to Doing', p. 159.

[20] On 'this is that' and 'then is now' dimensions of the radical moral vision of the Kingdom, see James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology. Volume I,* revised ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002, first 1986), pp. 26-34.

Christians has to undertake anew and on its own terms. As Yoder reminds us,

> The New Testament does not claim that Scripture contains all the answers. It rather promises us … that there will be adequate and binding further guidance given to the church as it goes along, and that this further guidance will be subject to the judgment of the community, oriented by the fixed points of the apostolic witness in the canon.[21]

In an earlier essay Grams made an attempt to locate Christian social ethics within a quest for distinct identity rooted in the narrative of the Kingdom and, in turn, the Kingdom's narrative in the hermeneutics of exile (following Yoder's 'diaspora witness'[22]). To find the link between prescriptive (normative) and descriptive (narrative or formative) Christian social ethics, I am convinced one needs to complement Grams' analysis with the piece that he purposefully decided not to engage with:[23] the ongoing narrative of the Kingdom itself. The scope of this response precludes a detailed outline of a possible approach, but it will suffice to note that its ground is set by a remarkably complementary series of works of McClendon and Stassen, sustained over more than thirty years,[24] and that of Grams. It invites further thoughtful engagement with the subject of moral norms and the narratives of the Christian tradition.

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[21] *For the Nations*, p 187.
[22] Ibid., pp. 51-78 and *passim.*
[23] 'From Being to Doing', p. 159.
[24] I have attempted to trace this development in a public lecture for the Applied Theology Seminar at IBTS, September 16, 2002.

Going on learning

Whoever does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple

IBTS Graduation Address – May 2003

Isaiah 6.1-8;   Luke 14. 25-33

Today our Certificate in Applied Theology (CAT) students and a group of our Master of Theology (MTh) students complete a particular pilgrimage which began, in some cases, several years ago, when they applied to IBTS from many churches and institutions across Europe and the Middle East to study at this unique world institution. The purpose of this cohort of students, if their application forms are to be believed, was to come to IBTS to undertake theological formation for various forms of Christian ministry in a whole variety of settings throughout this continent. It has been a period full of trials and joys, I guess, for all those who were selected to join this learning community!

Now, today, we confer diplomas on our CAT students, valedict several MTh students as they anticipate the examiners permitting them to proceed to write their dissertations, and have the joy of conferring the degree of Master of Theology on some who have not only attended the lectures and seminars and written the essays, but have completed and handed in their dissertations to the full satisfaction of both Internal and External Examiners. All our students join that unique band of people living in approximately sixty-one countries across the world – the alumni of IBTS. Yet I hope all those receiving diplomas, being valedicted and graduating, might be the first to admit that your education is not complete. There can be a danger, both for us and for the churches we belong to and serve, of thinking that the achievement of any theological seminary is to educate women and men – to 'form them' as modern terminology has it – for the service of the church, and that someone who has been to a seminary or seminaries for a year or more is thus formed and educated and equipped. Read any seminary brochure or surf the net to look at the countless magnificent web pages and institutions like ours informing you what a great person you will be and what an asset to the Christian Church you will become once they have explained to you the Old and New Testament, Philosophy, Theology, Greek, Hebrew, Church History, Christian Ethics, Missiology, Comparative Religion, Liturgy and Worship.

Now, do not get me wrong. I do hope you have actually learnt some things of value about the Bible, about the story of the people of God, about issues in ethics and mission, about our identity, our story as a people called Baptist. I hope you have learnt something about worship and preaching. If not, your lecturers and tutors will feel sorely disappointed today. But in itself these things are quite limiting. No, there are other experiences I hope the time spent here has imparted in addition to all the notes and lectures and resources; some other things which might be judged as of even greater value.

On vision

The first is drawn from the Isaiah reading. Of course, we do not easily understand the mystical imagery of Isaiah 6, but we get the sense of what the prophet saw and what was to be for him a sustaining power. When you look at the later experiences of the prophet it was as well he had a good experience to draw on, and I shall return to that point later. For now, I want to concentrate on this idea of call. To me, there must be a deep genuineness for all of us about our call to Christian ministry and mission, whatever form that takes.

I have known people who have applied for theological education believing that being a pastor theologian or church worker was a good thing to be in terms of social standing, authority, lifestyle and work conditions. There are Christian traditions and parts of the world where that is true but it is not true for those called out to serve and lead in Baptist churches in much of central and western Europe.

Christian ministry, applying the insights of the past years and your own vocation in Christ, is not going to get easier but, rather, harder and more demanding in every way in post-Christian, post-communist, post-modern Europe. Without vision, without that well spring of absolute understanding that at the heart of this creative order is a loving creator, the nature of whose love we see in Jesus, sustaining your work, your ministries will be impossible. Of course, some days the *vision* will not seem as bright. Difficulties, opposition, perhaps, worst of all, indifference by others to the things you count as precious – indeed life-giving – will drive you, if you are like me, to the edge of despair. Then, the *vision* will seem rather dim. Hopefully, the resources you have acquired through your time here will teach you from scripture, from the story of the Church – and perhaps particularly from our own baptistic history – that this is to be expected, though possibly not embraced with the eagerness that some of our Anabaptist foreparents had.

On calling

If we need a vision – hopefully refined, sharpened and focused through your time here at IBTS – there must also be calling. The prophet, faced with the call, answered 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips…'. Of course, one of the great worries of the prophet was that he would not know what to say. He didn't know enough. Hopefully, your time here at IBTS has taught you in much the same way. You now know there are many things about Christianity you do not know. You have learnt how ignorant you – and we – are. I believe that is a very good thing, for it will hopefully inculcate in you a reticence about being too dogmatic, a sympathy for those struggling to understand what it means to be in Christ, a caution in too soon condemning the views of others.

But beyond that will be the assurance that you have been called, in all your inadequacies, firstly into the community of those whom God has redeemed in Christ Jesus, an intentional community (about which we have tried to speak and think and be); then, for some of you, called out of one community to be formed and prepared and set aside to be an *enabler* of the people of God. I choose that word deliberately for the more I look at the discipleship model set by Jesus and the more I understand about learning, the more I see that what the people of God gathering in churches of faith really need are not Popes – whatever the denomination. Not all-intrusive watch-keepers, but rather women – let me say that word again so you have no doubt – women and men who work alongside the people of God to help them, to enable them to be what God intends them to be. So, though we have hopefully taught you how much you do not know, I pray we have also kept alive in you the answer to the question 'Who will go for me', and that it will always be 'Here am I – send me'.

On learning

So, we come to the New Testament and the apparently harsh call of Jesus to abandon family and friends, to pick up your cross daily and follow him. Now, in the presence of your comrades in this learning community, your friends, your teachers, for some, your families, I do not intend you to hear that injunction applied absolutely and specifically. We know about the Semitic way of speaking. Because of our introduction to the New Testament and because of good scholarship, we understand the rhetorical purpose of this passage, but we recognise it as reminding us of the importance – the supreme importance – of being a disciple of Jesus; that is, to be the first claim on our lives. And disciple, of course, means learner. At IBTS I like to talk about us as a learning community. Lifetime learning is one of those 'in' phrases from the world of education and commerce, but it

is always a phrase which ought to be applied to the people of God. Certainly, my aim for anyone coming here as a student is to inculcate in each one a desire to go on learning. Yes, we do hope some of the things we have shared with you over the years in classes, seminars and tutorials will stick with you, because we have tried to share things of great value for those who will be enablers amongst the people of God. But above all else I hope we have opened up to you the possibility of learning more; opened up the habits of reading, listening, reflecting theologically and in a baptistic way.

Such skills, such learning modes, need not be limited simply to your work in the Church – but used as members in your home civic societies. Discipleship is about learning, and learning for these purposes: firstly, that you might become more truly human, more all that God intends you to be, and, secondly, that you may walk with others as they also learn.

On the costliness of it all

Of course, both passages bear testimony to the fact there is a cost involved – for Jesus the cost was everything. For us, it might be less, but at times hard to bear. Again, the learning that has gone on through these past months and years has been designed and purposed to help you understand that and to equip you with resources to continue as a disciple. The order, the routine, the patterns of this place have been about providing a framework, a grid in which to be held during moments of particular trauma or concern. The student community has been a place where living cheek by jowl with others, exposed to the attitudes of others across our multi-national community, has, hopefully, removed the sharp edges; the more difficult personality traits have been challenged and you, yourself, have had opportunity to reflect on how you might live more appropriately for Christ.

Of course, no amount of community living, no amount of warnings about difficult days ahead can prepare you for all you might well face. But if we have given you some resources, that is important. More than that, as you join the alumni of this institution, we at IBTS do not lose an interest, a care, a concern for you all. Hopefully IBTS will remain a place to which you want to return, from which you draw encouragement and perhaps, even, seek advice in the days to come.

On not giving up

Which brings me to my final point. The vision, the calling, the learning are there to assist you towards the ultimate destination in the community of the redeemed. My final word is about not giving up. Unfashionably for some,

my doctrine of calling, my understanding of learning is about deep commitment for life. In the post-modern age doing things whilst it is fun, or whilst there is pleasure, or whilst it is good are the norms; the moment there are difficulties, move on, try something else.

My reflection on all of this is that we are called not to give up; perseverance. These things have their place in Christian discipleship and in the calling to be an enabler. We have done what we can for you – not enough, perhaps not well enough. Now, beyond all this lies the responsibility, and may God sustain you all in the years to come.

The Revd Keith G Jones
Rector, IBTS

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Statistics of Student Enrolment and Graduation IBTS, 1998-2003

Programme		1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003 *admitted as at 1/6/03*
CAT	Enrolled	N/A	N/A	16	18	20	*16*
	Graduated	N/A	N/A	15	18	20	
MTh	Enrolled	4	10	14	16	21	*25*
	Graduated	3	3	2	4	0	
	Writing MTh Dissertations	1	5	4	4	6	
	Transferred	0	1	0	0	0	
	Withdrawn	0	0	1	0	0	
MPhil/ PhD	Enrolled	0	2	1	4	5	7
	Graduated	0	0	0	0	0	

Book Reviews

David M Brown
Transformational Preaching: Theory and Practice
Virtualbookworm, College Station, Texas, 2003. 610 pp. US$ 21
Also in Russian, 2003. 745 pages.

David Brown is a preacher and rhetorician of great skill. In this important work, forged from his teaching in Russia, the Czech Republic and the USA, He introduces us to the theory and practice of an approach to preaching that is now being taught and modelled in various settings throughout Europe.

David has a great concern to help us understand that preaching is an event, which is persuasive rather than informative and that the preacher is central to the act of preaching. He has major sections on how we communicate effectively, the incarnational nature of preaching, using the Bible, the use of storytelling and preaching with an intention that there should be consequences.

He is concerned to help preachers become consciously competent at their task and so devotes a significant section to theories of human communication. He is concerned that we should see preaching as a Spirit-permeated one-to-many interaction given focus by proclaimed biblical truth. Of course, there are an infinite number of variants as to how that transaction takes place, affected by the preacher, the environment and the listeners.

With such a definition, David takes us through the many stages of preparing a sermon and preaching it. Though some important theories of communication are expounded, and detailed issues of using the Bible and thinking theologically are explored, the whole text is made readable by a good use of illustrative material, both personal and from the experiences of others, as one might expect from a preacher!

This book sets out to provide a resource to empower dynamic and relevant preachers for our churches. It is a full broadside against those who practice text-by-text exposition, against those who do not prepare, and in favour of the high calling of intentional communities of faith to have the Word of God proclaimed amongst them in ways which elicit responsive discipleship.

It is difficult to be critical of this work. It has been formed in a lifetime of preaching, tested and refined amongst preachers and would-be preachers from many cultures. If I have a concern, it is that the very size and comprehensiveness may put some people off. That would be a serious

error of judgement. This book will, almost inevitably, become the standard textbook for ministerial students and preachers. Anyone attempting to communicate Christian faith to congregations, large and small, will be well rewarded by reading it.

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Sharon Linzey (Editor)
Christianity in Russia and Post Communist Europe. Directory 2003.
William Carey Library Publishers, Pasadena Cal., 2003. 377 pp. US$ 23.99

This Directory is a very welcome handbook for everybody interested in religious developments in Eastern Europe. After the collapse of the Communist regimes, innumerable Christian organisations were established or re-established in this region. Also, several Christian institutions from all over the world extended their work into Russia and Romania, into Bulgaria and Belarus, into Albania and Azerbaijan, and into many other 'Eastern' countries.

Including approximately 3000 entries, the Directory gives convincing evidence that Christian structures for education, youth work, charities, church planting, media, and publishing have seen explosive growth. It brings together the experience of two earlier data collections, the so-called *Western Directory* (including data about Western Christian organisations working in the former communist bloc countries) and the *Eastern Directory* (including data about the indigenous Christian organisations). In this way, the Directory is not only about local efforts to develop Christian organisations in Eastern Europe, but also about Western (and beyond) Christianity's presence in this region.

Timing for the publication of this book is good: the religious landscape that was reshaped by the 'earthquakes' and 'volcanoes' of religious and socio-political changes at the turn of the 1980s/90s has taken clearer contours. The situation has become more stable. The Directory is a helpful tool for every historian, especially as the religion's role in the historiography of Eastern Europe is gradually gaining more attention. It is also an important resource regarding mission studies, and a valuable aid for those institutions looking for partners to reach common goals.

As any collection like this depends heavily on the information given – or not given – by the respondents, as well as on data found – or not found – on the internet, the omissions and occasional 'black holes' are inevitable.

The following are some random examples, mostly from a Baptist perspective: Moscow Christian Evangelical Seminary is included in the collection; however, the much larger institution – Moscow Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists – is missing. In the field of book publication and distribution, *Biblija dlja Vseh* in St. Petersburg has become an important vehicle for Christian literature work, and would have deserved an entry. At the same time, Dievturu Ramavas Draudze, (p. 255) although it is not a Christian organisation at all, is included; it is a community supporting pre-Christian Latvian religion. The Euro-Asian Accrediting Association of Evangelical Schools is in the Index under the subtitle Christian Education/Ukraine, though it would be more logical to find it under the subtitle Theological Education.

One wonders what criteria have been followed when information about local churches has been presented. Perhaps the criteria is that the church has been doing work in education, relief, mission or some other areas that give basic structure to the Directory, or that it is cooperating with western or indigenous organisations. However, this is not always the case. Perhaps these entries, though unsystematic as they seem to be, are meant to assist the so-called para-church organisations to find contacts with local churches.

This is not to diminish the obvious and unquestionable significance of the Directory. The volume is offering valuable data, helping to use the resources in a more effective way. Hopefully, it will serve not only as an informational source for Westerners, but also as a practical guide for East European Christians to develop their networking with each other as well as with their western partners. The editor and all her helpers should be congratulated for this outstanding product of their hard work.

The Revd Toivo Pilli
Director of Baptist/Anabaptist Studies, IBTS

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Rosie Chadwick (Editor)
A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ: Essays on the History and Life of New Road Baptist Church, Oxford
Published by New Road Baptist Church, Oxford, 2003. 410 pages.

Local church histories are commonplace enough and not normally worthy of review in this Journal. However, this significant volume is rather different from normal local church history. Firstly, it is not a linear history, but a series of essays all connected with the life and history of the church,

in self-contained chapters about families, specific events and relationships with external bodies such as the Baptist Missionary Society. Then there are the authors – four Professors, three Seminary Principals (past and present), three history lecturers and several denominational worthies!

New Road, Oxford, is, of course, not a typical Baptist church. It was founded at some point after Oxford surrendered to the Parliamentary forces in the English Civil War and the New Model Army arrived in the city, with the regimental chaplains and private soldiers preaching radical doctrines with missionary fervour. A hostile witness refers, in 1647, to 'frequenters of the Conventicles of Independents and Anabaptists'. Certainly by 1653 a Baptist church was sending messengers to the embryo Association meeting at Tetsworth.

Roger Hayden carefully unpacks those early beginnings with characteristic thoroughness; John Briggs explores the experience of this church during the anti-dissenters riots of 1715; Paul Fiddes explores the theology of the Oxford Church Covenant, which dates from 1780, and which welcomed to the Lord's table those 'sprinkled as infants'.

The work of several ministers and notable lay people are recalled, including the Alden family (who get a whole chapter to themselves) and Alfred George Palmer (Treasurer from 1937 until 1981), as the story of New Road unfolds. A whole essay is devoted to James Hinton (who arrived at the church in 1787 and served until he died in 1823), and helpful portrayals appear within other thematic essays of such redoubtable figures as the doughty Benjamin Godwin (pastor 1838-1845). Ian Randall looks at the life of the church during two World Wars and explores how a local church faced the impact, and Basil Amey deals with the interesting inter action between the BMS and the church from 1796 until the present.

Like all such books the end result is mixed. Each chapter is very readable. However, we lose the coherent story of the church. Against this we gain insight into various facets of a community of intentional disciples covenanted together and living out a dissenting life in a very Anglican stronghold with a certain solid determination over a period of more than 350 years.

The book is certainly worth acquiring for seminary libraries and for those with a keen historical bent as it is full of illuminating pericope and has a scholarly quality not always found in standard local church histories.

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